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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001652

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [CG](#) [ELECTIONS](#)
SUBJECT: DRC ELECTIONS: KASAIAN VOTES WILL BE KEY FOR
PRESIDENTIAL WINNER

REF: A. KINSHASA 1642

[1](#)B. KINSHASA 1644

[1](#)C. KINSHASA 1591

[1](#)D. KINSHASA 1540

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Western and Eastern Kasai provinces are a key battleground in the October 29 presidential election. The over two million voters who abstained in the July 30 first round could be crucial to victory for President Joseph Kabila or Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba. Neither obtained a majority of votes in either province during the July 30 balloting. Kabila won some support in rural regions in the Kasais, but fared poorly in the cities. Bemba was strong in Kasaian cities, but needs first-round turnout there to significantly improve in order to make up a large nationwide deficit. End summary.

NEITHER CANDIDATE A CLEAR FAVORITE

[1](#)2. (U) The majority of voters in Eastern and Western Kasai provinces are up for grabs in the October 29 DRC elections. Neither Kabila nor Bemba won a majority in either province in the July 30 first round, and turnout was below the national average. The estimated 2.3 million voters in both provinces who abstained in the first round represent over half the margin that separated Kabila and Bemba in the final tally. Bemba scored a 32 percent plurality in Western Kasai and Kabila a 36 percent plurality in Eastern Kasai.

[1](#)3. (U) Participation is expected to increase this time (ref A), and these votes will be critical for both candidates. Kabila has maxed out his voter turnout and support in eastern DRC. Bemba's new ally Oscar Kashala (ref B) can not assure Bemba a majority, even if the 18 percent Kashala won in both provinces fall into line this time. Neither candidate was endorsed by the dominant Kasaian political party, the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS).

BEMBA LEADS IN THE CITIES, KABILA IN THE INTERIOR

[1](#)4. (C) Most Kasaian observers told us earlier this month they expect the presidential race to be close in both provinces. They expect Bemba to win in urban areas, particularly the provincial capitals of Kananga and Mbuji-Mayi. Voters there are largely hostile to Kabila, blaming him for their economic and social woes. Kananga's Catholic Vicar-General Monsignor

Lufuta Mujanyi told us many Kasaians view Kabila as a liar for not having fulfilled promises to bring water and electricity to the city, and will vote Bemba to punish Kabila. Similarly, Eastern Kasai's former vice-governor Patrick Baluba (a member of the RCD party) said voters in Mbuji-Mayi are more likely to cast their ballots to hurt Kabila rather than out of loyalty to Bemba.

15. (SBU) These same observers expect Kabila to carry the rural vote. In the July 30 contest, Kabila won most of his Eastern Kasai votes in the rural areas of Kabinda and Sankuru. MONUC-Kananga Head of Office Jean-Victor Nkolo told us October 1 that Kabila supporters in Western Kasai have more money to spend than their opponents and have established a broad-based campaign structure to target rural voters. Kabila did poorly in Western Kasai in the first round, but Nkolo said his supporters had organized a much better campaign this time.

KEY FACTORS: PARTICIPATION AND PERSONALITIES

16. (SBU) Two key factors in this urban-rural dynamic are voter participation and the force of personalities. More people live in cities such as Kananga, Tshikapa, Mbuji-Mayi, and Mwene Ditu, but turnout rates there were much lower than the sparsely populated rural areas. Mbuji-Mayi, with some 525,000 registered voters, saw a participation rate of just 17 percent, while in the northern city of Lodja, with about 170,000 registered voters, the rate was nearly 75 percent. Kabila won Lodja with nearly 82 percent of the vote.

17. (C) As is the case throughout the country, personalities

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remain important to the Kasaiian political equation. In Western Kasai, Kabila enjoys the support of several popular local figures, including former provincial governors Claudel-Andre Lubaya and Tshiongo Tshibikubula. Lubaya and Tshiongo both have strong networks throughout the province

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and are helping direct Kabila's campaign. Bemba's chances in Eastern Kasai are bolstered by the support of province's popular current governor, Dominique Kanku, who turned down a National Assembly seat to remain governor (ref C). Kashala's last-minute endorsement may benefit the Vice President somewhat (ref D), but MONUC-Mbuji-Mayi Head of Office Mamady Kouyate said Kashala won in the city in the first round simply because he was the last candidate to campaign there.

HURDLES TO OVERCOME

18. (C) Both candidates face significant hurdles in the Kasais. Kabila engenders strong animosity among those who believe he has ignored development in the region and favored the east. In Western Kasai, where he won just 11 percent July 30, he has no guarantee of picking up the nearly 18 percent that went to Antoine Gizenga of the Unified Lumumbist Party (PALU), with whom Kabila now has an alliance. PALU's political director for Western Kasai, Serge Mwata, told us October 2 that he expected no more than half of PALU voters in the province to vote for Kabila in the second round.

19. (C) Bemba has logistical and financial problems. His party is based in urban centers and has little capacity to campaign elsewhere. MONUC's Nkolo told us members of Bemba's Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC) party are reluctant to provide funds for his campaign. The MLC's provincial executive secretary Albert Usotshika admitted that it lacks sufficient personnel to campaign in rural areas.

¶10. (C) Bemba must win both provinces to counter the strong support in Kabila's eastern base, and he hopes to rally most of the first-round abstainers in both Western and Eastern Kasai in order make up his current deficit. By contrast, Kabila could almost assure himself of victory nationwide simply by denying Bemba votes in the Kasais. He could theoretically take both provinces if first-round turnout holds and he won the rural vote there. However, prospects of increased voter participation in Kananga and Mbuji-Mayi have enhanced Bemba's chances, and could complicate any Kabila hope of carrying at least one of these provinces. There are no indications, though, that the 2.3 million Kasaians who abstained the last time, particularly in the cities, will mobilize in sufficient numbers to counter the higher turnout in rural areas. End comment.
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